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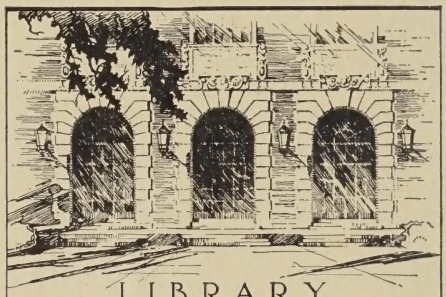
THE MICKLE DREDE AND OTHER VERSES; WRITTEN BY GORDON BOTTOMLEY.



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# THE MICKLE DREDE AND OTHER VERSES.

THE MICKLE DREDE AND OTHER VERSES; WRITTEN BY GORDON BOTTOMLEY.

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## THE MICKLE DREDE.

*Concerning the unfaith of a King to a young damozel, and the things that ensued therefrom.*

A GRIM stake stood outside the town
The flame's betrothed to stay,
For a dame o' the Queen's and a Church-damned witch
Was to burn that Lammas day.

She had cast by spells and magic black
To work the death of the King,
To make him pine and waste and rot,
A snow-flecked, leprous thing,

But her sister went, and told him all,
The other's lands to earn,

And they sorely racked her white body
Or ever they let her burn.

The red dawn shot with a watery glare
Across the face of the sky
As from her prison dark and chill
They led her forth to die.

With a band of steel about her waist
They clasped her to the stake:
She cried "I would I had slain the King
For my dear, dead daughter's sake."

As he rode that morn to a woodland chase
He stopped by the blazing pile
And, gibing, said "Thou art soon from thy bed,
Enchantress unclean and vile.

"Thou core o' the fire, the pain is dire
That thrills in thy scorched breasts' swell,
But 'tis light to the sting of thy soul's sad meed
That flames in the midmost Hell."

"There is no flame in Hell;" she said
"Hell is cold as thy heart is cold

And black as thy crafty heart is black
With monstrous sins undoled,
As though the wind of a sullen frost
Shrilled through its dismal fold,

" For Love has no abiding there;
Such is the Lord's decree—
Come quickly, King, thou hast earned a place
In its loveless life and dree.

" Its iron gates are gaping wide,
But nought will I step therein
Until I have thee by the hand
That thou mayst speak for our sin.

" I have fallen to set thee a fitting doom
For the death of my lovesome may;
She was killed by the burden of the wrong
That she did beneath thy sway:

" Fretting, she slowly sickened and sank
With the shame of her one ill deed;
I saw her life's flood dwindle and fail,
But she took little heed.

" As a breeze-breath stirs the serried flags
In the shoals of a green-masked mere
Her fingers swept her lute's thin strings ;
Each note felt like a tear :

" Then she clanged the tender strings till they cracked ;
Their notes fell like the throng
Of heavy drops in a thunder-shower
And she sang this mournful song—

" ' *I have culled the fruit of the Knowledge Tree*
*And the grief that it yields I know* ! ' . . . . . .
Aye, she lay and munched that bitter fruit
Till her heart-strings brast like the strings of her lute,
Tense-plucked to that song of woe.

" Her smile was sweet as a new-done sin
Ere thought begins to rise
And sad as the shade of hope in Hell
When the soul went out from her eyes.

" I laid her away in a seemly tomb,
And there the body bides
With the half-born child of thy pitilessness
All dead between its sides.

" In the night new-passed, of my nights the last,
I saw midst a mist of light
Her shape, moon-splendid, within my cell,
In Heavenly birth-weed dight :

" She spake ' The sands in thy glass of earth
Are few, and their way is wide ;
I may not speak of thy after-life,
But thy death-night side by side

" ' We shall meet the King, and thy foiled revenge
Shall be as a finished book.'
King, didst thou hear ? it is no lie,
And this very night thou mayst look . . . ! "

The flame-flowers yearned till they kissed her mouth
With the kiss of a fair-faced hate,

While anon a pine-brand burst with a noise
Like the finger-snap of Fate;

He loudly laughed and rode away;
They wreathed above her head,
Enfolding her body shrunken and black
In a streaming shroud of red.

Her spirit passed beyond all space;
God took her down-cast hand;
She shuddered, wonder-dazed, and said
"I do not understand—

"For I have sinned; how then can I live
Thy white, clean Heaven within?"
He said "Thy love was very great;
As the sun makes nought the night's pale mate,
So it has dimmed thy sin."

"But see, I have no fit attire;
Send me to Hell, O God!"
"Look." Then she saw that woofs of sheen
Her stoled, her veiled, her shod.

A stir was heard as of wind-swirled leaves,
And lo, in the ether bright
There stood her daughter, like herself
In Heavenly birth-weed dight.

God said "The King is yours this eve
To suffer your vengeance meet:
I have pardoned ye, now do to him
The thing ye hold most sweet."

. . . . . .

'Twas late that night and the King still rode,
In a valley deep and bare;
He had strayed from his 'wildered company,
Who sought him with anxious care.

The night-wind rushed through the yielding tops
Of the firs on the gaunt hill-side
With a sound like the sound of a storm-swept sea
That runs with a rising tide;

The corpse-wan moon was swathed in a cloud
Dead-black like a bier cloth,

As though it would hide in the dire mid night
From the dead dame's tryst of wrath.

While he slowly fared on his unknown way
He thought of the witch's word
And shrank with a new-born, nameless fear
If a new, strange sound he heard,
Were it only the click of a hoof-struck stone
Or the hoot of the night's quaint bird.

Then in the darkness he seemed to see
A mist-made woman go
At his either side, with each a hand
Upon his saddle-bow.

He thought that fear had filmed his eyes,
When a voice like a half-spent sigh
Said "King, thou hadst my girlish trust
And I bent me to thy boundless lust,
That wrought me misery.

"Hast thou no care for thy evil deeds,
No dole for my early death?"

Then the other spake with a little voice
As still as a soft-drawn breath,

"Though the gates of Hell are gaping wide
Nought shall I step therein;
I have stood before the beautiful God,
Who has blaunched my scarlet sin.

"He has said that we may ride with thee
Till our foiled revenge is sped:
Know then, O King, that its name is Love
From the sprites of the lately dead!"
His fear sank like a sun-quelled haze;
"I too have sinned" he said.

As he spake the cloud wraiths seemed to fade;
He sprang to stay their flight,
But, touching nothing, swerved and fell
From his horse in deadly plight.

Both God and Hell were looking on
And saw the soul from him twine;
Then all Hell laughed "To us, little soul!"
But God said "He is Mine."

The eye of the moody night unclosed
Ere it set behind the trees,
And showed on the dead King's upturned face
A smile like a kiss of peace.

## DAWN BY THE FIRTH.

SWANHILD stepped forth from her father's steading
*The corn was knit into goodly sheaves*
And fared to the fields in the moonlight treading
*While a low wind crooned in the aspens' leaves.*

She bosomed herself in the dreaming corn,
*The corn that was knit into goodly sheaves:*
It dreamed through the night till the busy morn,
*While the low wind crooned in the aspens' leaves.*

Long, long she looked where the great firth widened
*Not far from that acre of goodly sheaves*
With violet eyes which tearfully brightened,
*While the low wind sighed in the aspens' leaves.*

" My love in his dromond sailed over the bar
*When the corn was knit into goodly sheaves,*
To win for me silken wedding-gear,
*And we heard not the boding wind in the leaves.*

" Since then 'tis many a year-long day "
*The corn-plumes rustled above the sheaves*
" But he never returns, though I watch alway "
*And the sad wind sobbed in the aspens' leaves.*

Then she sank to sleep with the tears on her face
*That was shaded by the drooping sheaves,*
And ever the grey dawn came apace,
*While the faint wind slept in the weary leaves.*

It seemed a hopeless dawn enow,
*Far away stretched the goodly sheaves*
Till the East breathed out a tender glow
*While the moon yet laundered the aspens' leaves.*

The song of a lark awakened her
*Gently waved the tips o' the sheaves*
To the sight of a dromond crossing the bar
*As the wind awoke in the aspens' leaves.*

It furrowed up the weltering lane
*(She rose like a slim stalk from the sheaves)*
That was crimsoned by the sun-birth's stain,
*And the wind upturned the aspens' leaves.*

Its keel was beached on the meadowy strand
*Near the ending rows of the goodly sheaves;*
In sooth 'twas her lover who leaped aland
*While the wind swept through the trembling leaves.*

A man and a maid in a kind embrace
*The corn was knit into goodly sheaves*
And the joyous dawning shone in her face
*While the light wind sang in the aspens' leaves.*

" Loosen and shower thy hair among mine; "
*Golden grain-tresses stooped over the sheaves*
" Its crystal gold round our twin necks twine."
*With the laughing wind in the aspens' leaves.*

Midst eddying hair, to her father's steading
*(Through the auburn aisles of the goodly sheaves)*
Deep-raptured they went, in the sunlight treading,
*While the sweet wind kissed the aspens' leaves.*

## THE PREY OF THE SHIFTING SANDS.

"SOMEWHAT cleaves the salt sea-air
With a panting, throbbing swish!"
"Aye, 'tis a ravenous hoodie-crow
That scents a dead man's flesh."

*Tells the tale of fearsome things that happened the night afore.*

*When the lithe sea flows at the mirk mid night*
*Strange shapes of dead folk come*
*Where its thin lip scars a shifting beach*
*With a line of leprous foam;*

*They walk such sands at the mirk mid night,*
*Those who have passed i' the year,*
*Awaiting their weird of Heaven or Hell*
*With something of human fear.*

Fierce, eldritch pines were tossing their arms,
  Their blasted arms and grey,
O'er the wind-swept, stony heath that sinks
  To the shores of the Dolorous Bay.

As the brow of a man is seamed by hate,
  The changeful, changeless deep
Was ranged by a merciless Northerly gale
  In long-swung waves and steep;

It soon dispersed a scent of fog
  That had thickened upon the plain;
Like a wild swan shaking its stream-wet wings
It flung afar storm-heraldings,
  Fine, feathery gusts of rain.

Along a track like a torrent bed
  That runs toward the sea
Strode a damoiseau in raven weed
  Holding a sprig of rosemary,
  Memorial rosemary.

"*I seek the hithe of the bodiless folk*
  *(For there will my dead love come),*

*Where the seas's lip scars a shifting beach*
*With a line of leprous foam.*

" The sky is black, for the drifting rack
Gives never a hint of moon,
And yet 'tis but an hour agone
That the wet and tawny sand-stretch shone
In the light of a plenilune.

" Faint, flickering spires of flame appear,
Like star-shine on waters suave,
A flickering light, or red or white,
Cresting each whirl-poised wave.

" The wind is blowing for rain to-night,
Making a word-like moan—
' Woe, woe to the souls of the blood-red flames! '
(It says in an undertone)
' On earth they were flushed with that tinge of
Hell! '
(To a shriek its voice has grown.)

" They spit and flash as the breakers crash
On the trembling, treacherous sands,

But the churned foam flies and knits in the air
And lo, a meinie of wraiths is there,
With their soul-flames in their hands;

"Around their flagging, trailing feet
The writhled mort-cloths fall,
The shade whereof in the night is that
Of a dead man's face beneath a pall,
A dull, half-lifted pall;

"The flaw-blasts shear not their rippling swirls,
And dimly can I see,
Through spirit and woof dreamily grey,
The surf shake doubtfully."

On, on they passed, like a frosty breath;
The gear of the foremost forms
Was soaked and discoloured with corpse-water,
And some was riddled of worms.

The storm-wind veered and dropped, but yet,
With fluctuant, flexile sway,
Those mystic, misty winding-sheets
Fluttered across the bay.

On, on they passed, from first to last,
But the last he feebly saw
Was tightly wrapped in new grave-clothes,
A bandage clenching its jaw;

The bandage clipped a narrow chin,
A cowl hung out from the head:
He crossed a space of wet sea-wrack
With weak, uncertain tread,
The wrack-balls bursting beneath his feet;
"O burd Alys!" he said

"Fain, fain, from the side of thy new-filled grave
Have I sped as I best might
To this dreaded bourn of the stricken of Death
For the tryst of thy life's last night."

On, on she passed nor turned at his voice;
In vain did he beseech,
So he wildly followed her lessening shade
Till he stood on the shifting beach.

It gripped his feet; it gripped his knees;
It made his bone-pith grue

As inch by crawling, slimy inch
  His helpless corpse it drew ;

It licked his throat, it licked his mouth
  Like the tongue of a cruel beast,
And still, far off, ghost-graithings flapped
  In a spirit-gale fro' the East.

Then the labouring, ominous clouds
  To a sheer, cool moon gave birth,
And he saw once more the race o' the sea
  And the gorse-gold bents of earth ;
The sand-grout quivered beneath his eyes
  As he wept for the joy o' the earth :

(That calm, slow-shining face looked down
  On his soul's and body's pain
And danced in his sight with a blear halo
  Of vaporous wreaths of rain)

In the inmost gloom of its sterile womb,
  Beset by memories,
For a life-long moment he strove for life,
  With moons in his palsied eyes.

When the corpse-cold peace of a sheltered pool
  Is shattered, then ring on ring
Is launched across its waveless waste,
  Weaker in widening,
Until it falls asleep again,
  A deathly looking thing,

And so the sands above his head
  Shuddered and then were still,
But his breath oozed through and a livid flame
  Burnt there with a hovering thrill ;

His wraith rose thence and, the flame in hand,
  With sunken jaw, stark-eyed,
Paced in the wake of the vanishing train,
  By the line of the sinuous tide.

*It walks those sands at the mirk mid night*
  *With the folk who have died i' the year*
*And await their weird of Heaven or Hell*
  *With something of human fear,*

*But, when their death-year is overpast,*
  *Swayed by the Future-Norn,*

*They will leave the place of the shifting strands*
*For the lives they have shaped with their earthly hands,*
*Within the keel of the new year's morn,*
*A strange-hued new year's morn.*

## OVER SEA.

BETWEEN the wind and water
A ship of lazuli
Sails like part of the laughter
Of the rippling, lilting sea.

Out toward the sun-gate
The joyous shipmen steer,
For the isle which is the one gate
To the life of love sincere.

Between the wind and water
Amidmost of that isle
A sea-king's budding daughter
Has dwelt for many a while.

Nought of anger or teen
Or ought which is unkind

Can breathe in that isle between
The water and the wind.

Thither the Norns had brought her,
Far from the kindreds' ken,
For the kind god-folk had fraught her
With love for the whole of men.

World-lovely the dear gods wrought her,
So every dame espies
The shape of the sea-king's daughter
Deep down in her lover's eyes,

And men who in their dreaming
Behold a perfect face
Find all its glamour teeming
In that sea-damzel's grace.

By day and night slim maidens
Attend her circlewise
And sing a varying cadence
Of the light in young love's eyes.

O silk-soft hair and shoulder
  And little change thereof,
For how can folk grow older
  In the Isle of the Youth of Love?

Then out toward the sun-gate,
  Ye joyous shipmen, steer,
For the land which is the one gate
  To the life of love sincere.

## A HAVEN BY THE SEA.

A KEEN wind swithers up the street,
Wet with swirling, scurrying sleet,
Past where the land and the water meet
On a sullen, rocky shore;
It whips the spin-drift far and wide,
The tossing hair of the madding tide
Rent by that whirl-blast frore.

The sleet dirls on the window-pane
And the salt ooze crusts thereon; the strain
Of the wind on the door-boards sounds amain,
But the fire burns clear within,
Where the carlines crouch by the flame-filled hearth
That is heaped with the spoil of the hazel-garth
And croon as they drowsily spin,

*" The sucking child is warm at the breast*
*And warm in the ingle-lee,*
*But the man who gat it is cold on the breast*
*Of a leaping, twisting sea,*
*For there's never a wight in the town this night*
*And never a boat at the quay."*

Like the Autumn dance of a withered leaf
The yawning bell on the sunken reef
Is hurled aloft as the billows heave,
And clangs like the pulse o' the sea,
The pulse o' the wind and the sea,
While the surf beats out an answering boom
Like a knell from a cavern beneath the spume,
Muffled and moodily.

There's never a wight in the town save one,
The priest of the church on the seamost dune,
Who prays therein by lights stream-blown
From the draught through a shattered pane;
Where, as those guttering tapers fail,
The carven saints seem stiff and pale,

Cling-swathed by their stoles, through a chill
mist-veil,
Like the shapes of drownèd men.

At last the day springs wildly sweet,
But dreadful women slip down the street
To the place where land and water meet
On a sullen, rocky shore ;
Where the long, hard grind of a striking keel
Is heard above the wind's wail shrill
And the plangent billows' roar.

## TWO BALLADS.

### I. EBB TIDE.

"THERE'S salt on your ashen lips, lady,
And salt in your windy hair;
From your kirtle's hem to your girdlestead
It fouls the sendal fair:

"The sendal fair is dripping-wet,
Its crimson is turned to grey."
"Once it was hued like my light heart's blood,
But that, I swear by God His rood,
Turns grey in my veins to-day.

"'Tis the salt o' the sea that dulls my gear
(Fit sign of joyaunce fled)
But the salt of tears that fades my blood,
Of the tears I cannot shed.

"The salt in my back-blown, streaming hair
The wind shall winnow away,
But its pallid, lifeless hue shall creep
Through my tresses golden-gay
(From my blood to my tresses gay)
And my oft-kissed lips shall shrivel and crack
With the blight of a sundered fay.

"I caught his hand o'er the creaking gunwale;
The oar-sweeps bruised my side;
I went till my feet lost hold on the sand
And my waist was wet in the tide;

"But I won no word from his muttering mouth,
No glance from his shifting eyes . . . . . .
Nay, touch me not—your pity is vain;
God's mother has pity for my pain;
In her house my succour lies."

## II. GREY NUN'S POOL.

Dull and dark is the fenny moorland,
Dull is the withering day,
For smoky and smouldering seems the sun

That dips into dimness far away,
Far and far away.

The mist creeps up and the mist creeps on
From the lifeless, livid pool;
Over its edge and beyond its edge,
Clinging and clammy and cool.

Now what is this that, moving, seems
A shadow cast thereon?
Is it a wimpled woman's form
With the face of a voiceless moan,
Or a shifting denseness of the mist?—
The mist from the pool has gone.

Now what is this that floats at rest?
A water-lily pale?
Nay; through the darkness slowly dawn
Grey robes and a sodden veil,
And locks like tangled water-weed
About a sad face sail.

A hurried whisper of soft grey skirts,
A ripple that gurgled and spread,

Perchance a sigh for a parting breath,
And the grey nun sank and was dead.

Her nun's gear floats her to earth again,
But it shall not bring her to Heaven:
God's mother's pity was numbed in her,
So evermore with her sagging care
Her soul shall be burdened and riven.

## THE LONELY TOWER.

IT stands in a rising, windy valley,
A waste diseased and dull,
Where no bird ever comes anear
Save the wretched, screaming gull;
Its windows are shapeless and empty and dark,
Like the eyeholes of a skull.

In that drear dale, the summer through,
None ever sees the sun,
For densely laden with heavy vapours
The lift is livid and dun,
And wearily seems to settle and sink,
Like reek on a foggy town.

A spindle-tree grows near the hearth,
Where the house-queens spun in a ring,

And over the fallen daïs a tangle
  Of briars is wandering,
Pranked with shrivelled, nodding hips
  That purple toward the Spring.

Afar, from the top of its sinking walls
  Streaked yellow and black by smoke,
Is slowly seen a mist-met sea
  Which the wildest wind ne'er woke
Up from its oily, leaden wash,
  Where foam-tips never broke,

To the clash and crash of bickering billows:
  When this would creep anigh
To land, it shrinks at a mile-long marish
  Grey with salt blown dry,
Fretted with clear-edged brackish pools
  That mirror an ashen sky.

The weight of the passive years upon it
  Presses it to the ground:
Within its hollow, rafterless halls
  By the cracking roof-tree crowned

Although the film-winged bats are flitting,
Their cry they never sound,

But sullenly hang like a cloud of dread
O'er the dusky silences :
The folk of the stony lands about
Have a heavy fear of these,
Holding that subtle evil spirits
Breathe in their chill wing-breeze.

Once a maiden sought its summit
But swooned ere she mounted there,
For strange things crept on her hot, dry cheeks,
Slight-rustled her tingling hair,
While wanton whispers of elvish laughter
Swirled down the serpent stair.

And ever such whispers of shuddering laughter
Haunt the glooming day,
And the sobbing voice of a wailing woman
Creeps through the tower grey,
Of the woman who flows through its turbid shadows,
Whose face is hidden alway.

Through wind-rent rifts in the evening mist
  Its wavering shape is seen
By chance wayfarers up the vale;
  In the doubtful, varying sheen
A moth-faint woman tosses her arms—
  Then the white mist rolls between.

## ON THE MOOR : HAWORTH.

THE heather's bloom seems but a dim-hued haze
Midst half seen hollows of the lonely moor,
But on thwart slopes the ebbing sun's last rays
Still strike to purple this, the light-tide's shore.

A solitary shepherd, staff in hand,
Outlined against the sea of fading flame,
Calls to his dog to seek the wandering band;
His harsh voice, dwelling on the creature's name,

Rings almost sweetly from yon distant hill—
"Far away out! Go farther out!" he cries;
The sound speeds with a pleasant, curious thrill
Throughout the evening hush and slowly dies.

Across the dulling sky a curlew wings,
  Wailing anon its weary, changeless strain,
Until the night her starry kirtle brings
  And in its hem enwraps the billowy plain.

The waters of a many-channelled stream
  Sound faintly, plashing down some stony steep,
As though a woman in a happy dream
  Sighed rimes to lull an imaged child to sleep.

Far through the vale a feverous, seething town
  Flaunts like a prostitute amid the night,
In tawdry pomp, as of her draggled gown,
  Painted and decked with flaring gusts of light,

But here no clamours in such grossness come
  To rend the evening with their strident strife;
The world is silent as a woman's womb
  Pregnant with possibilities of life.

To those who humbly sit at Nature's feet,
  Listening intently to her murmurings,

She gives an insight subtle and complete
Into the secrecy of common things:

The swelling uplands, sweet with summer dew
Or in a white and wintry mantle clad,
To such yield lessons wonderful and new
In the art of Life, and every flitting shade

Of cloud-shapes cast across the ample waste
Makes, like an altered mood, another scene,
Until the moorland seems a jewel chaste
And rare, of many facets' changing sheen.

Hither three maidens came and loved it well,
Holding such converse with its calmness vast,
And still their lives' works of those day-dreams tell,
Deathless, though they were dead in years long passed.

Who reads therein may joy in a sublime,
Fair-mirrored picturing of Nature's face
And from the limbec of their vanished time
Distil the intimate motives of his race.

The ambient darkness holds a shadowy sense
Of presences unseen, as if their room
Of Heaven clasped within its influence
The place that filled their lives with its perfume.

Wend we away, the night is wearing on
And save a wind far-fluttering, faint to cease,
That softly soughs its old, slow-sinking moan,
There gravely reigns o'er all a perfect peace.

## CARTMEL.

IF winds may sleep, yet float along
The fragrant freshness of the air,
Like dead Ophelia river-swung,
To wake in wonder otherwhere,
Then in this nightfall thus they sleep
Adown the valley dim and deep.

Amidmost of the restful town
Flows either way a winding stream,
Soundlessly swirling, lucid, brown;
The motion of an idle dream
Is theirs; they bring a cooling balm
Into the immemorial calm.

Great masses loom where in the sky
Faints darkling day's forgotten blue,

Hinting that here the priory
  Rises o'er dwellings clustering, few,
Which shyly glimmer through the gloom
Like nuns about a saintly tomb.

Moth-like upflits the dove-grey smoke
  Therefrom, o'er streets which cloister-wise
Surround this church by nameless folk,
  Wan votarists, built : dull centuries
Have left their house bereaved and worn,
More strangely still, more world-forlorn.

Swiftly as swallows downward dart
  From moss-fringed eaves above the quire
Sonorous pealings somewhiles start
  Out of the louvred belfry-tier,
But now a solitary tongue
Rings for the quiet evensong.

Yes, through these streets now darkly vague,
  Where night meets travellers like a wall,
Cowled brethren oft would fondly lag
  Ere to some ceremonial

They went, in worship to intone
A drowsy, droning antiphon.

In claustral silence they would paint
  The missal's marge of vellum wide
In glowing hues with Queen and Saint
  Nor deem that men, well-satisfied,
Would rend the bright illuminings
To line Genevan gospellings.

What if, in quivering ecstasy,
  They dowered Mary with the eyes
Of youthful-loved ones? Then, shall we
  Prate of their useless sacrifice,
Their scorn of life's ordained increase?
Nay; rather envy we their peace.

For life is good among these hills,
  The spirit's increase full and sweet;
And though earth's bourn the vision fills
  Upward no barrier we meet,
Nor does the lark, whose strength of wing
Bounds his supernal carolling.

Earth's bourn the vision fills, and yet,
For those too sensitive to light,
Even at the rich, subdued sun-set,
Earth offers many a rapturous sight;
The varying green of wood and lea,
The silver of the far-off sea.

. . . . . .

Over the stony, treeless fell
There slowly mounts a staring moon
Which lessens to its pinnacle,
Showing beyond the milk-white town
The road which wavers white and clear
Up the long vale to Windermere.

## AN AFTER WORD TO LE MORTE D'ARTHURE OF SIR THOMAS MALORY, KT.

WHEN England was a single-hearted land
And knight and churl loved well these tales of old,
Slim, golden-snooded damozels oft scanned
Stained parchments dight in colours and in gold,
And their white odorous bosoms, lightly stoled
In silks which showed their shapes, heaved pityingly
Whene'er the scroll told some new misery.

Of woeful punishments for pleasant sins,
Hope and despair, love-life and waimenting,
The tournay's joyous, song-inspiring dins,

Hurtling of destriers, lances splintering,
And arduous questings for the Holy Thing
Alike they read, living each scene again,
Glad in its joy and painèd by its pain.

When all the earth lay silent in the frost,
As though it brooded o'er its vanished weed
Of leaf and flower and fruit, but lately lost,
And past the frost-clear moon thin rack did speed,
Hurried by winter winds; taking no heed
Of the pale beauty of the drowsy earth,
The folk of mountain thorpes in simple mirth

Drew round their hearthstones: while each maid and wife
With laden rock and busy spindle spun,
Far-travelled carles would tell of legends rife
In outland towns and, ere their tales were done,
Ere Gwennivar or Beale Isoude had won

Rest from hot loving, many a maiden's
breast
Beneath her coarse blue kirtle had no rest

For pity of their sorrows, and the twirl
Of spindles faltered as each youth did press
The arm or girdle of some comely girl,
Filled with compassion for the wretched case
Of knight or lady: thus in happiness
The evenings passed and love, but newly
born,
Was fostered by those plaints of love for-
lorn.

Makers of might have oft these stories told
In times gone by which never can return,
In times gone by, when men were not acold
To others' joys and griefs, but now men spurn
These simple things as newer arts they learn,
Deeming that such quaint tales have been
for long
The silly croonings of an old wife's song.

As in a jar the rose of yester-year,
Though shrivelled, yields a subtle fragrance yet,
Raising mist-memories of the summer's gear,
Of close-curled buds with eye-clear dew-drops wet,
Of blooms far-blown, like suns about to set,
Perchance unto a few these histories
Still show dim lights in dead Love's once-bright eyes;

Unto a few, untouched by lust of gain,
Lovers of beauty for the sake of truth,
Who hold full dearly that fair dame Ellayne,
Mother of Galahad, and have deep ruth
On Gwennivar for her ill-ordered youth;
These guide their living by the olden tale,
Hoping to see afar the great Sangrail.

## A LITTLE CHAUNT OF THE THREE HANDMAIDS OF THE SANGRAIL.

TOGETHER.

HITHER come we, haloed maidens,
Bearing bread and wine on patens:

ONE.

White my kirtle, thine is crimson,
Cecily's has orfray hems on,
Cecily who bears the wine
In a cup with seraphims on:

EACH AND ALL.

Carol then, O sisters mine.
Both bread and wine are sainèd:
Said Lord Christ the good
"Take, eat—this is My body,
Drink—this is My blood."

Raise the crystal hanap, angels,
Its dark burden will not change else
To the liquid ruby-clear;
Raise the sacrilegious spear:
Uriel, Michael, Gabriël,
Sick nuns toll the chapel bell;
  Where we bring earth's blood, come you,
Bring God's blood to make them well
  (God is in the earth's blood too.)
    Uplift the hanap, angels,
      Or ye do amiss:
    Thus spake men's Lord and angels'—
      "Drink ye all of this."

## TO CAMELOT.

SLOWLY the smooth, dim river moved,
Seeming half asleep,
And wild-fruit blossom snowed on the boat
As though the trees would weep.

Now this is the song of the dark boatman
Who rowed the dead Ellayne
In that stately barge up the soundless stream
To Launcelot again.

" I wear o'er the Grimwood water
With my lief lord's dead daughter ;
She rests upon this sable bier
And though I speak she will not hear,
But still her hair purls past her cheek
In glistening masses, fine and sleek,

Then rests upon her bosom's snow
In one clear, golden overflow;
Its radiance, soon to fade, alas,
Makes her gold fillet seem but brass.
Where lilies once and roses met
Within her face is coldly set
In a white, wistful, dreamy look:
Her eyes, whose light Love's wing-wind shook
As the sighing air thrills a sunlit brook,
Are hidden; only their faint lashès
Stir gently in the kissing breeze.
Her silken gown is deftly wrought
With wild-rose and forget-me-not,
But its long, still folds are as carver's ware
Hewn for some queenly sepulchre,
For she is lifeless though so fair.
With love of a mighty lord, 'tis said,
Her white heart brake and her white soul fled,
So I wend to bring her goodlihead
To him that he may see her dead."



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And this is the dirge that the dark boatman
Crooned for la Blaunch Ellayne
As he rowed her up that soundless stream
To Launcelot again.

## ARTHUR THE KING WENDETH TO HIS REST.

THE sun had vanished, but in the sky
There lingered a rose-tinged ashen dye
Like fallen roses that withering lie
In the grass of a garden close,

And like a bell did the North wind boom
As if a bell in the forest's gloom
Lifted its mouth to sing of doom
Where the grave-stones rise in rows.

Adown the mere a swarthy ship,
Kissed by many a smooth wave's lip,
Sluggishly swam, with heave and dip,
Black was its swollen sail;

Within its wide womb damzels stood,
Quiring to viols of carven wood,
In raven robes and each for hood
Had a wind-tossed raven veil,

While dight in dole-weeds, fold on fold,
Sable-girdled and sable-stoled,
Sable-amiced, with crowns of gold
Three queens sat in its prow;

The soft-woofed sendal draperies
Clung about their breasts and knees
As thin mists cling to willow trees
When Autumn evenings grow.

The damzels sang to rote and croud
"*Is it a sail or a winding shroud*
*That like Death's ruthless wing is bowed*
*Over our mournful boat?*

"*With golden tresses or silvered hair,*
*Alike we wail a common care,*
*For Death we know not and Life is fair.*"
Thus ran the cheerless note.

At last they neared the water's edge,
Where wavelets wapped in a fringe of sedge,
The grim barque cleaving like a wedge
That tender, swaying green.

As pensive lilies aspire, full fain
To meet the incense-wooing rain,
The queens arose when on the plain
A heben knight was seen,

And stepped ashore at his beckoning,
But, blaunched, with faint feet faltering,
They soon returned, in their arms the King
Swooning from grievous hurts,

While, as they moved, there trailed behind
An orris-fragrance in the wind,
The sighing lapse of silken-lined,
Long-drawn, slow-swinging skirts,

As though sweet-smelling waters fell
Into a basin like a bell,
Whispering a simple knell
For short-lived pleasaunce flowers:

They brought him to the vessel's side
And raised him in, but he had died
Ere, oar-sped, they began to glide
Over their former course.

On a dark-hued sleeve his head did rest,
His feet lay close to a virgin breast,
And a throbbing heart to his side was pressed,
So that his body shook,

But his limbs were pale and chill like those
Of an ivory Christ that dimly shows
On the rood, where many a candle glows,
Through censers' heavy smoke.

The quiristers ceased; on their faces fair
Stood tears of passing great despair,
And they shrieked as they came to that island where
The mould his form should cloak.

## A BALLADE OF THE COMING OF THE SPRING,

Clothed in a conceit of an Aubade to my lady at her chamber-window.

*In the arising of my lady an allegory of the advent of the Spring is intended, even as Messer Botticelli hath wrought, in his picture of "Primavera", the advent of the Spring in the guise of a beautiful stately woman.*

THE silent air is tremulous
With song from a soft-throated quire
Of culvers gently amorous;
The sky is like a great sapphire:
O damozel of my desire,
Put off that gear of linen bright;
Descend and touch to something higher
The morn's new sense of rare delight.

Flower-wreathed, with raiment floating loose,
Like Lady Flora, of grace entire,
Come from thy round, twelve-pillared house,
While, ringing from my simple lyre,
Slight cadences of quivering wire
Herald thy ever welcome sight;
Come, with a deeper joy inspire
The morn's new sense of rare delight.

Let the blithe wind thy tresses toss
(The wind that waxes ever shyer
Among the trees) and waft across
This lawn the blooms that deck thy tire,
And, while their falling petals gyre,
Will I, thy lover, hail the sprite
Within thine eyes the central fire
Of Spring's new sense of rare delight.

THE ENVOY.

Sweet queen, do on thy clear attire,
Like lily-buds, green seamed with white,
And come to me, for I aspire
To Spring's new sense of rare delight.

*Now in this ballade are many things symbolized. For instance, by my lady's linen night-gear I mean the white weed of Winter, and when I ask her to doff that gear and to don her pied kirtle, I signify the change from the bleakness of Winter to the fine hues of Spring.*

## IN AN ORCHARD.

THE errant twigs of the apple trees
Were dight with much bloom full-blown;
Now hither, now thither, like stars it shone
As the branches swayed in the Spring-tide breeze
That blew with a merry moan;
'Twas rose-tinged and white as the winsome lass
Who lay on the petal-strewn, dasied grass,
With the green of the leaves aboon.

She lay limb-length on the orchard sward
Bewitched by the song of the boughs;
Her wheat-red tresses streamed aloose
In a joyous aureole and barred
The blades into streak-thin rows;

A soundless harmony, gold and green,
With the petals her glamouring hair between,
Made supple by gracious dews.

She rose and went from the orchard garth;
The world seemed a monotone,
For the grass-grown, petal-strewn, daisied earth
Was all alone.

## VERONICA VERONESE.

A picture by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

SILVER strings and crystal songs,
Lute and lark, lark and lute,
Music calling music forth,
Music making music mute;
Silver strings are little worth
When the lark his note prolongs;
Mute! O lute.

Flesh lives only from the spirit,
Soul and hand, hand and soul:
Though she touch her loved lute's strings
Ne'er so well, its music's roll
Sinks when even a caged lark sings;
Hand-wrought sound-webs have no merit
While her lark rimes like a whole,
Song-filled soul.

## DANTE'S DREAM OF THE DEATH OF BEATRICE.

A picture by Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

"*Incipit vita nova*" Dante wrote,
But thus his young life shadowed to its end,
And though that newer life should soon amend
Death's severance of unknown flesh, yet nought
Such bitterness of spirit e'er had brought
To him as that fair vision did: to wend
With pure and grave-eyed Love but to attend
Upon her loveless leavings him distraught.

Two gracious damzels raised the flower-sprent pall,
That flame-garbed Love her pallid brow might kiss;
The dull-red poppies strewn upon the floor
Effused a drowsy power which swayèd all;
Love led him then to look upon once more
The radiance that had once been Beatrice.

## THE HARBOUR OF REFUGE.

A Picture by Frederick Walker, A.R.A.

MORNING to evening falls in Life's short day,
And, in this setting's dimness roseate,
Age, burdenless, thinks on inpending Fate,
And glides with gladness on that ending way:
Unheeding Youth, curbing its footsteps gay
To aid the steps of one who feeble gait
Thus leads her to her rest, likes not this state
Of listless change: this thing Youth's heart doth say.

Rathe Manhood scythe to scythe with Time swift-paced
Strives eagerly, but all in vain; he yearns
For love's high fulness; then he slowly learns
That ripeness sinks to age ere he can taste
Half of his heart's desires; life seems a waste;
But age to gracious, endless youth returns.

## CHANT D'AMOUR.

A Picture by Sir Edward Burne-Jones.

SOOTHLY these lovers hold speechless, sweet commune:
The passion of love makes light his thoughtful eyes
With flame like that of lustral sacrifice ;
In delicate embroideries a tune,
Quivering and low, like mavis-lays far-blown,
Slips from her organ; as the notes arise,
A progress of mellifluous melodies,
Her love speaks to him, chastened as his own.

The great lord Love, with calm compassionateness,
Inspires the breath that thrills the pipes to song,
Whence comes that singing's arduous perfectness.
To these their mutual presence is enough ;
Their souls unite, they need no fleshly tongue,
Loving within the very sphere of Love.

## THE TRUE POET.

ALTHOUGH the haunting fairness of the earth
Thrills with deep-surging passions of delight
Full many hearts, that clear and inward sight
Whereby those wonders bring new thoughts to birth
Is held by few, while many minds in dearth
Of vision-strength behold them vaguely slight,
As if they saw a crystal statue dight
In coarse-wrought, soil-stained cloths of paltry worth.

Within the temple of the Jews a veil
Concealed the holiest place from vulgar eyes,
And those who seek to know such mysteries
But from the faintness of their soul-sight fail
Are thus shut out, seeing beyond their pale
Bewildering lights, distorted presences.

## TWO SISTERS.

*In an Athenian garden: Cleöne speaks—*

THE moon dawns: dear Leuconoë, it is good
That we seek sleep: come then, to-morrow's bride,
Let us once more our garments lay aside
In yon cool chamber fragrant with a flood
Of scent from odorous blooms and sandal wood;
The saffron robe and cestus there abide
Thy nuptial rites, whereto the moments glide,
Far holier than any maidenhood.

This poppy clinging to thy shimmering hair,
Of deep-grained petals and a long, lush stem,
Is fair enough, but in its flame-hid core
Lies promise of a garden-full of them,
And thus thy womb, made fruitful, shall assure
Thy grace of love when thou art otherwhere.

## THE DUAL LIFE.

WHILE some fair damozel sees in a stream
Her other self, wraith-like in liquid grace,
Perchance the mirrored heaven of her face
Is shattered, like a shadowy shifting dream,
By some slight wind; this earthly life doth seem
Some such frail image which its lines doth trace
Upon the everlasting for a space,
Then is erasèd, as a meteor's gleam:
But still the beauty of the maid is there,
Still shine the stars although the meteor fell,
And in their vividness they far excel
Those transient apparitions of their truth;
Even so we see in earth-life brief yet fair
An adumbration of the spirit's growth.

## DEATH,

### A dream and a thought thereon.

*While sleeping.*

DEATH, like a maid, came through the gate of horn
And seemed to wrap me in her coiling arms
As white as shrouds, and straightway all her charms
I saw and loved as by her I was borne
Throughout her night of nothingness to morn;
Then said she "My still chilliness thus warms
Those whom I bear, for I seem all the forms
Of those earth-loves from whom my spoils are torn."

*Whilst waking.*

The sun, when setting fairly on this land,
Dawns fairlier still upon some alien strand,
And I, as this world's shape of me lies dead,
Perchance shall sail into the golden West,
Within a spirit ship, at Death's behest,
And see, Columbus-like, new worlds ahead.

## HAWORTH CHURCH.

THE grey, stark church that crowned this barren brow,
Beset by tombstones, bare to every breeze,
Has gone, though still its tower, worn and low,
Glooms out, a beacon to the centuries ;
And in its stead this stately fabric stands,
With fine-spun traceries and lofty roof,
Lacking, amid its splendour wrought of hands,
The lowly charm that set the place aloof
From the outer world while o'er each vanished wall
An old simplicity yet held its sway,
Which from the past seemed ever to recall
The homelier worship of an earlier day :
That artless House outlasts its wood and stone,
Living through memories mightier than its own.

## MASTER EDMUND SPENSER, HIS "FAËRIE QUEENE."

A KING once made a subtly mazy bower
And set his love therein, to be its heart:
Thus she, the Rose o' the World, was set apart
From all the spite and jealousy that lour
On love i' the world, and hour on joyous hour
She dallied there with none her will to thwart,
While birds with stream-like song there-through did dart,
And fickle bees loved, kissed and left each flower.

O King of songsmiths, such is this thy work;
A maze of many mazes, wherein we
Who love thee have delight and often lurk
With flowers and maids and music pleasantly,
While all the world without seems in the mirk
Of sordiness and strife and misery.

## TO MESSER DANTE ALIGHIERI,

After reading H. W. Longfellow's translation of his "Divina Commedia."

I FAIN would read thee in thy Tuscan tongue,
For, though thy alien guise be passing fair,
I feel that otherwise and otherwhere,
Within those notes which thou thyself hast sung,
Lies the wan sorrow from thy spirit wrung,
Lies the bright gladness which I long to share;
None poet these can render with such care
As should bring perfect light thy lines among.

Of men not thou alone hast been in Hell,
But unto few hath it been likewise given
To rise therefrom to the delights of Heaven;
Therefore I add my praise of Beatrice,
Thy angel love, who rapt thee to that bliss,
Whereof it was thy joy in verse to tell.

## "A MULTITUDE OF THE HEAVENLY HOST."

THERE swept throughout the purple depths of night
All-glorious angels from the bourn of Heaven,
A perfect company, their number seven,
And they were seen of shepherds in their flight;
Passing, they were revealed in lambent light;
Each bore a scarlet lily plucked at even;
The flame-like hair of each was interwoven
With golden garlands very fair and bright.

They sang and, as the shadow of a song,
Their peaceful voices, mingling with the sound
Of pleasant instruments and marvellous,
Proclaimed the advent of a King, uncrowned
On earth, Who, moved by love, was come to us
From out His sempiternal angel-throng.

## "SHEPHERDS ABIDING IN THE FIELD."

A Mystery for Christmas.

A Shepherd.

LIKE a sainèd candle's light
Upspiring in the windless night,
Keen-dazing to our groping sight,
Shines out the new-born star;

The frozen dew that hangs fro' the grass
Seems snowdrop-blaunched beneath its rays:
Great things shall surely come to pass
From such a portent rare.

A Young Shepherd.

In a neglected garden-close
A pale, belated lily blows
And lo, this thornless, opening rose
Against its stem I found,

For thereabout a rose-bush twined:
'Tis strange when frosts the brown earth bind
Such wonder-goodly blooms to find
In that wild posy-ground.

*And suddenly a glistening youth is standing in the midst of them, saying*

A lily for Mary
The Mother of Christ
Who brings Him to keep
His lovesome tryst.

A rose for Christ
Without a thorn;
The thorns will come
When He is born.

*Then they see him no more, but an old shepherd comes toward them and speaks—*

Fellows, within the hillside fold,
In its grey walls' shadow cold,
There bides a lamb a moment old—

THE YOUNG SHEPHERD.

Thorn-buds my rose-stalk clothe.

THE FIRST SHEPHERD.

A pearl-like, tremulous radiance
Soft-shimmers and limpid rainbows glance
I' the East, whence aureoled youths advance
With psalms of Sabaöth.

ALL THE SHEPHERDS.

The beasts kneel like folk worshipping ;
We hear in this pure carolling,
This ecstasy of glorying.
The sun-star's matin-chaunt.

*Three kings come riding by.*

ANOTHER SHEPHERD.

Old men, old men, whither do ye wend ?
Your weed, wherein rich colours blend
With golden threads, is travel-stained—

THE KINGS.

The star our bourn shall grant.

. . . . . .

MARY : *in a byre of Bethlehem.*

The surgings of maternity
Widen beneath the heart of me ;
Lord, it is time that I bear Thee ;
    Thou knowest I will well.

*Then God, stooping, enters into the world by man's gate.*

JOSEPH.

Lay Him in the humble cratch,
Where the star gleams through the thatch—
Behold, an angel keepeth watch—
    Nowèll, Nowèll, Nowèll!

## A CAROL FOR CHRISTMAS.

ANGELS, angels,
What do you sing?
"Glory in the highest
To Christ our King.
Mankind is born again
To enter into Heaven,
For Christ by Mary Virgin's womb
To earth is given."

White mother Mary,
Suckle thy Child;
Hap Him from the cranny-winds
Whistling and wild:
All souls' anguish
All and utterly
Shall pierce through thine own soul
If He should die.

Star-bearing angel,
So let it shine

That it shall bring the nations
Before His eyne :
For all its splendour,
In His diadem
Thy star was erst and e'er shall be
The meanest gem.

Spider, spin a fine web
O'er Him all day,
Hiding Him from Herod
Eager to slay :
Mary is a poor maid
Gear she may not win ;
All the silk that He shall wear
Spider shall spin.

Good father Joseph,
Cherish Him well ;
Bear Him into Egypt
From traitors fell.
Angels, sing your sweet song ;
Of Jesse's lily-stem,
This wemless maid, The Christ is born
In Bethlehem.

## THE FOOLISH VIRGINS.

OUR lamps were filled at Olive Mount;
Content, we leisurely return;
Five maids are absent from our count—
Perchance their lamps have ceased to burn.
Hearken, the Bridegroom comes apace
With soft-shod, chaunting thurifers;
The clear processional upraise,
Nor heed our sisters' cares.

*We fling no flowers along Thy path,*
*For flowers spring where Thy white feet fall:*
*Pluck we the gracious aftermath* . . . . . .
Sleep-heaviness is on us all:
We drowse against the outer gate . . . . . .
The voices sink; elsewhere they pass.
Open the door, we will not wait.
The door is barred, alas.

Beyond the door that quiring rare
  Acclaims the Bridegroom and the Bride;
Our sisters' voices mingle there—
  In outer darkness we abide,
For even now our faint lights fail;
  With lights the Lord has come and gone.
Self-pitying penitents, we wail
  The heed we gave to none.

## A MAD MAID'S SONG.

THE day had a sunless dawning,
The lark forgot to sing—
Is this the lark that creeps in the grass,
With a trailing, wounded wing?

My tears with the rain are mingled:
Of rain and tears I am fain,
For all the flowers, all the flowers,
Are sweetest after rain.

The day has a sunless ending;
The rain will never cease;
The other flowers, weary and wrecked,
Find sweetness in death's peace.

## PROMISE OF FRUIT.

RAIN of the plum-bloom, rain of the cherry
Slightly falls when the wind is weary
(Wonder-white are the petals rent);
Wantonly whirls when the wind is merry,
With a faint-filled aura of scent.

Pale is the pear tree; pink is the apple
Whose silk-fringed buds the grey boughs dapple
Over the half-born, hesitant leaves.
This is Our Lady Flora's chapel,
Under the fledgling leaves.

## A RING-DOVE SONG.

SOFTLY I sing you, sweet,
Songs of the swaying tops,
Darkly green, of the fir-trees;
Airily light, of the beeches.
Here, in the twittering frondage,
Sweetly the scent of larch-bloom
Over me sweeps in a tide,
Breaks on this emerald shore.
Softly the branches wave,
Soft as I sing to you, sweet.

## JOHN KEATS.

THY name was writ in water thou didst say:
That water, bright with riches never told,
Was thy life's stream; when it had lapsed away
Thy name stood on its bed the world in gold.

## WILLIAM MORRIS: HIS "EARTHLY PARADISE."

THOSE men of old sailed over sunlit seas,
Questing in vain for Eden-Garden's ease,
But we, far happier, find in gracious wise
Within their tale our earthly Paradise.

## "A DREAM OF JOHN BALL": BY WILLIAM MORRIS.

HERE through the portal of a dream
Imagination's moteless beam
Shines on a place of happy folk
Unburdened by their fellow's yoke:

While noiselessly along the grass
The hopeful men and women pass,
Unwittingly they wend, I wot,
To "Lands of Matters Unforgot."

## FOR A GRAVE ON THE MOOR, NEAR STANBURY, YORKSHIRE.

CALMLY I lie in heat and cold,
In the new year, in the old,
Ashes to ashes and dust to dust;
Here to live I have no lust.
Body, rest in the upland bleak;
Forth I go, old friends to seek.
Sing me dirges, grouse and plover,
When the moor is painted over
With the purple of the heather;
Snow, in windy wintry weather,
Lightly press on my body here;
This is its bed from year to year.

## SISTER TO SISTER.

"SCARCE can I see your golden head,
Or the white, square pillow whereon 'tis laid:
Make room for me within your bed;
*'Tis cold alone, my sister.*

"The frost has pierced me through and through;
The bony arms of the dry trees grue;
The moon and stars seem frozen too:
*My bed is cold, O sister.*

"Half numbed, your side I slowly approach;
Your warm flesh shrinks at my cold limbs' touch—
Shrink not from me overmuch,
*Softly pulsing sister.*

"I have been across the meadow-land
To the garth where the frost-hoar church doth
stand:
I plied a spade; on my either hand
Swells a mattock-blister.

"There's a hollow grave in that bare church-
yard;
The mould a-side is frozen hard:
'Twill be cold beneath the roofing sward,
*Darling sister.*

"Why have you stolen my love from me?
Did you wither my face by sorcery,
Then laugh with him at my misery,
*Wonder-staring sister?*

"I am dark and you are fair;
Thin and raggèd is my hair.
'One is foul and one is fair'
*Said your knight, O sister.*

"See, I hug a little knife,
Cold against my hot heart's strife,

That shall twine you and your life."
*The frightened maid has kissed her.*

"Baby kisses and caresses
Shall not heal my hate: time presses—
My hand is in your tumbled tresses,
*My knee in your womb, white sister.*

"I draw your glimmering head back, so;
The speech-bud gurgles to and fro
Within your throat—the blade slips through . . .
*(Now the dead-throes twist her.)*

"Your night-sark makes a bonny shroud,
But the neck-band seems a welt of blood;
Cover it with your virgin-snood,
*Dainty, modest sister.*

"I smooth your long locks over all,
To be a moment's golden pall—
Life lingers in them; they slide and crawl
Away from my fingers, sister.

" Death crushed your breath in his tightening
arms ;
I wind you in my lean, lithe arms :
Your mouth is open, but no alarms
Can come thereout, my sister.

" You are dead-tired—take your rest ;
Your tender head is fitly placed
Against a loving sister's breast ;
*Your bosom is stilled, dear sister.*

" Creep we darkling down the stair,
Whose chill strikes up, for my feet are bare,
But 'tis nought of the chill in your feet so fair,
*Sleepy, silent sister.*

" The middle of the night is past ;
Day breathes ; the moon-spy, bloodless-faced,
Swoons down the sky : let us make haste
To your house, O sister.

" The stir of wind before the dawn
Whispers across the sparkling lawn.
'Tis the churchyard gate I rest you on—
*I too am tired, sister.*

" Dull and sickening is the sound
As you thud on your face in the deep-dug ground :
The mould falls on you . . . . . a well-turfed mound
Arches over you, sister.

" Do you hide beneath from the dead folk's lear,
As a child creeps under the sheets for fear ?
I would your knight were with you there,
His arms about you, sister.

" Your warmth is still in your empty bed ;
I will lay my body where yours was laid.
Good night. (She will soon be earth, this maid,
As though none ever wist her . . . . . )

" I can feel your blood ooze out of the ground ;
My aching feet it trickles round ! "
*'Tis the sword-stiff grass that your feet doth wound,*
*O conscience-fearful sister.*

## WATCHERS.

AMELOTTE.

WHAT of the night? O sister, say:
Can you see the winding frost-bound way,
Or hear the beating of hoofs thereon?
I think your ears are hard as its stone:
Nine times do I ask and nine do you turn,
But never a word from your lips can I earn,
Though dimly your wide eyes smoulder and burn.

JEHANE.

The black frost holds and the moon is dead;
Underfoot and overhead
Black, black, black is the thick night spread.
All in the tower are sunken deep
Into the hollow dusk of sleep.
The murky air is dense with shades,

Perchance of self-slain, loverless maids:
'Tis over dark to see even a ghost,
But swart hair-sheaves are whirled and tossed
To make the night more dark than most.

AMELOTTE.

Is there any beating of hoofs heard yet?

JEHANE.

Simple sister, pine and fret
For the lover who never comes,
The lover who bides in dream-land homes.
Think you any knight could care
For Amelotte of the ling long hair,
Of the spindle-arms and the sunken cheeks,
Like a corpse of seven weeks?
Wot you any who would rest
On Amelotte's yellow and shrivelled breast,
Wrinkled and stained like a rotting apple?

AMELOTTE.

The priest is waiting in the chapel,
That I to my knight may be truly knit,
Whose love enlaps me every whit
As the white light laps the Saints who sit
Along and along God's banquet hall.

Mighty is he of his hands and tall;
No stooping wizard, wizen and old—
O me, my heart is very cold:
The icy stillness of the chamber
Is shaken only when an ember
Crackles in cooling or falls on the hearth;
The root of the last torch flares in its girth:
All seems stiffening into death,
Even my breast as I try to breathe.

JEHANE.

Come to the room of the vermeil door
And look into Hell through the hole in the floor.

AMELOTTE.

—The bell in the night has a deeper tone
Than it ever had in the dullest noon.—
Up nine steps and down a score;
Somewhat aglow creeps on the floor!

JEHANE.

'Tis the light from under the vermeil door.—
Your face is grey 'neath the murky cloud
O' your hair upswept on the flame-blast loud,
Strange hair that swings up the copper wall,
Making its crusted green scales fall,

Patter and tinkle as they fall.
There lies the hole with Hell below,
Square-edged and sharp and sheer I trow,
The hollow hole with the copper bars
Nailed to the floor with fallen stars,
Seven athwart and seven along,
Welded together, ruddy and strong;
And now and then a flame licks through,
From the ocean of windy flame below
That hisses and wails and bellows so.

*Look at Jehane with upturned face,*
*Warming herself, close to the blaze:*
*Haughtily queenly there she stands,*
*With outstretched arms and outspread hands;*
*The deep light shows through her fingers thin,*
*And plays on the curves of her throat and chin,*
*The wondrous curves of her throat and chin:*
*Though her face in the shadow is hard to see,*
*Her close lips smile continually,*
*As though far down in dim watèr*
*Rippling like her scarce-seen hair,*
*Or all about her the tortured air;*

*But her slow smile's meaning is hard to tell,*
*As she warms her hands at the fire of Hell.*

JEHANE.

Hold my hand and lean thereover ;
Mayhap therein you will see your lover.
The fierce light gives to your roses sere
The hue of life they have lacked this year.

AMELOTTE.

My hands are crossed upon my breast,
(God once clung to a maiden's breast,
Being a baby on Mary's breast : )
Dear Lord, hasten my lover's quest.

JEHANE.

Think you any one could care
For Amelotte of the ling long hair ?

AMELOTTE : *softly.*

(Hoofs in the courtyard, feet on the stair.)

JEHANE.

With smooth forefinger dipped in the flame
Let me sain you in my lord's name,
Swayer of those who bide below,
Whom you watch with eyes of woe.

SIR YVAIN.

Crafty sister, cruel sister,
By despair you sought to tryst her
Within the land beneath the floor,
But you never shut the vermeil door.

AMELOTTE.

O healer of sorrow, my sorrow is o'er.

## TO THE READER.

(October 5th, 1896.)

*Autumn falls quickly on us hereabout;*
*Wreckage of roses strews the garden-ground;*
*Stripped are the orchards of their gleaming fruit;*
*Somewhat of Winter's wan and weary round*
*Tinges the days, and mournful is the sound*
*Of wind and sea, while ever a mist of rain*
*Hangs in the trees and blurs the window-pane.*

*Now, standing in the twilight of the year,*
*Awaiting its oncoming night of death,*
*Into the darkness slowly creeping near*
*Along the roadway of the desolate heath*
*We look, and linger ere we pass beneath*
*Its heavy languor of sleepy, short-lived days,*
*As tired wayfarers look into the haze*

*Of gloom that gathers for a moonless night,*
*Knowing their haven is a far-off land ;*
*Thus lingering, long we for a world more bright,*
*The world of Spring-tide, where on either hand*
*Of every lane the budding hawthorns stand,*
*Waiting to welcome May with bursts of bloom*
*And launch the Summer on seas of deep perfume.*

*There, in the year's high-tide, will be no need*
*Of wavering fantasies that seem scarce nought,*
*But in dark days mayhappen some will heed*
*The things that never were, the things forgot,*
*Which I to soothe my weariness have wrought :*
*If any praise them, let his praise be paid*
*Unto my master, who is lying dead.*

*As children in the twilight fashion tales*
*From mighty stories that their elders love,*
*(Crouching, half-fearful of their own faint spells)*
*So in song-working I have loved to move*
*Within his wake who had great skill thereof,*
*The weaver of dreamy melodies and strong,*
*The thunderous viking of the ways of song.*

. . . . . .

*The rain has slackened slowly, seeming spent;*
*The valley is fulfilled of silences*
*All intertangled and together blent,*
*The silence of dead winds among the trees,*
*The silence where the roof-smoke spires with ease—*
*O silent land, even now one sound is thine,*
*The evening lowing of tense-uddered kine.*

Gordon Bottomley
in Silverdale, 9th. August, 1938.

THE END OF THE MICKLE DREDE AND OTHER VERSES; WRITTEN BY GORDON BOTTOMLEY; PRINTED IN KENDAL BY T. WILSON AT HIS PRESS IN HIGHGATE; 1896.

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